

Tagish language

Tagish was a language spoken by the Tagish or Carcross-Tagish, a First Nations people that historically lived in the Northwest Territories and Yukon in Canada. The name Tagish derives from /ta:gizi dene/, or "Tagish people", which is how they refer to themselves, where /ta:gizi/ is a place name meaning "it (spring ice) is breaking up".^[4]

The language is a Northern Athabaskan language, closely related to Tahltan and Kaska. The three languages are often grouped together as Tahltan-Kaska-Tagish; by some the three languages are considered dialects of the same language.^[5] As of 2004, there was only 1 native fluent speaker of Tagish documented: Lucy Wren (Agaymā/Ghùch Tlâ).^[6] She died in 2008.^[7]

	Tagish
	<i>Tāgish</i>
Native to	Canada
Ethnicity	Tagish people
Extinct	2008, with the death of Lucy Wren ^{[1][2]}
Language family	Dené-Yeniseian? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Na-Dené ▪ Athabaskan ▪ Northern Athabaskan ▪ Central Cordillera ▪ Tagish
	Language codes
ISO 639-3	tgx
Glottolog	tagi1240 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/tagi1240) ^[3]

Contents

- Classification**
- History**
- Tagish on First Voices**
- Notable people**
- Geographic Distribution**
- Phonology**
 - Consonants
 - Vowels
 - Tone
- Vocabulary/Lexis**
- Writing System**^[27]
- See also**
- References**
- External links**

Classification

Tagish is among many other languages within the large language family of Na-Dene languages,^[8] which includes another group of indigenous North American languages called the Athabaskan languages.^[9] The Northern Athabaskan languages are often considered to be part of a complex of languages entitled Tagish-Tahltan-Kaska. The languages in this complex have an extremely similar lexicon and grammar, but differ in systems of obstruents.^[5] Known alternatively as Dene K'e, Tagish is also closely related to the neighboring languages Tahitian, Kaska, and Southern Tutchone.^[10]

History

The culture of the Tagish people has its roots in both coastal Indian cultures and those from the interior (Tlingit and Athapaskan respectively).^[6] Trade and travel across the Chilkoot pass contributed to the mixing of these cultures. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Tlingit-speaking peoples began to move in from the coast and intermarry with the

native Tagish-speaking population. By the time outsiders first made contact in the 1880s, the majority of the people were bilingual, and the Tlingit language had replaced Tagish as the language of the majority.^[6]

Tagish became less common partially because native traditions were domesticated and suppressed by colonial administration through writing because there are open ended possibilities inherent in oral dialogue which are impossible to convey through text.^[11] The most significant impact on the decline of nearly every native language in Canada came when aboriginal children were forced to attend residential schools where they were forbidden to speak their own languages.^[12]

After the Yukon Gold Rush in 1898, English became the majority language of the area. As the majority of children attended the English-only Chooutla Anglican school nearby, fluency in the native languages began to be lost. Language courses began to be reintroduced in the 1970s, but the programs had little funding and were not comparable to the French or English programs present. More recently, political awareness has led to movements to gain constitutional provisions for the language, as well a greater focus on in-school programs, language conferences, and public awareness.^[13] For example, in 2004, Southern Tutchone and Tagish languages are being revitalized and protected through an on-line approach called FirstVoices.

The federal government signed an agreement giving the territory \$4.25 million over five years to "preserve, develop and enhance aboriginal languages",^[14] however Tagish is not one of the offered native language programs. Ken McQueen has stated that despite efforts, the language will likely become extinct after the last fluent Tagish speaker dies.^[15]

Tagish on First Voices

FirstVoices is an Indigenous language computer database and web-based teaching and development tool.^[16] Tagish was one of the first to be added into the FirstVoices digital multimedia archive of endangered indigenous languages.^[13] Resources on the site include sound files of name pronunciation, word lists, and some children's books written in the language. This language documentation is intended to create a holistic platform where identity, oral tradition, elder's knowledge and the centrality of the land can all be intertwined.^[17] On the Tagish First Voices page, there is a total of 36 words archived and 442 phrases archived as well as the alphabet complete with sound recordings. To provide a cultural context, there are also a community slide show and art gallery section. This website also has welcomes from a multitude of elders complete with contact information about the website's contributors.^[18]

Notable people

Angela Sidney was a prominent activist for the use and reclamation of her Tagish language and heritage in the southern Yukon Territory. Born in 1902, her heritage was Tagish on her father's side and Tlingit on her mother's side. Sidney's accomplishments include working with Julie Cruikshank, documenting and authoring traditional stories^[19] as well as becoming a member for the Order of Canada in 1986. Sidney died in 1991.^[20]

Lucy Wren was the last known fluent speaker. She was actively involved in the recordings and stories used on the First Voices website including the "Our Elders Statement" before passing in 2008.^[21] This work by Lucy Wren has been continued by her son Norman James as he works to record more language and culture of the Tagish and Tlingit people for the Yukon Native Language Centre and the First Voices website.^[22]

Geographic Distribution

The Tagish people make their territory in southern Yukon Territory and northern British Columbia in Canada,^[4] most specifically at Tagish, which lies between Marsh Lake and Tagish Lake, and Carcross, located between Bennett and Nares Lake.^[6] The majority of the area in which Tagish was spoken is made up of the Lewes and Teslin plateaus.

Phonology

The Tagish language includes aspiration, glottalization, nasal sounds, resonance, and tones.^[23]

Tagish is characterized by the simplest stem-initial consonant system of the Northern Athabaskan languages, and also has a conservative vowel system as well as conserving stem-final consonants. Final glottalization is lost. Constricted vowels are pronounced with low tone.^[23]

The Tagish language includes nouns, verbs, and particles. Particles and nouns are single, sometimes compounded, morphemes, but the difference is that nouns can be inflected and particles cannot. Verbs are the most complex class in this language because their stemmed morphemes have many prefixes which indicate inflectional and derivational categories.^[24]

The total inventory of phonemes present in Tagish includes:^[25]

Consonants

Classification						
Unaspirated stops, affricates	t	ʈ	ʈʂ	ʈʃ	k	?
Aspirated stops, affricates	t ^h	ʈ ^h	ʈʂ ^h	ʈʃ ^h	k ^h	
Glottalized	t'	ʈ'	ʈʂ'	ʈʃ'	k'	
Voiceless Continuants	ʂ	s	ʃ	x	h	
Voiced Continuants	ʐ	z	ʒ	y		
Prenasalized stops	m ^b	n ^d				
Nasals	m	n				
Resonant	w	j				

Vowels

The short vowels /i, e, a, u/; as well as their long counterparts /i:, e:, a:, u:/.

Tone

High tone is marked with (́) on short vowels and (́́v) on long vowels while low tones remain unmarked^[26]

Vocabulary/Lexis

Some women's names contain the nasalized prefix *Maa* which translates directly to "mother of."^[26]

Writing System^[27]

The language makes use of the Latin writing system. The Tagish alphabet, as seen in how it is written, is present in the table below.

Tagish Alphabet								
Consonants	Stops and Affricates		d	dl	dz	j	g	
		t	tl	ts	ch	k		
		t'	tl'	ts'	ch'	k'	'	
	Fricatives		tʃ	s	ʃh	x	h	
			l	z	zh	ÿ		
	Nasals	m	n					
		mb	nd					
Vowels	Glides	w				y		
	Short	i	e	a	u			
	Long	ī	ē	ā	ū			

Nasal vowels are denoted by a hook as follows: (ā).

See also

- [Tagish](#)
- [Tahltan](#)

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External links

- Yukon Native Language Centre's introduction to the Tagish Language (<https://web.archive.org/web/20080417165007/http://www.ynlc.ca/languages/tg/tg.html>)
 - Audio lessons. <https://web.archive.org/web/20080110174009/http://www.ynlc.ca/materials/lessons/wrenl/index.html>
 - Audio storybooks. <http://www.ynlc.ca/materials/stories/tg.html>
- OLAC resources in and about the Tagish language (<http://www.language-archives.org/language/tgx>)
- The Tagish First Voices Project. <http://www.firstvoices.com/en/Tagish/welcome>
 - Word list. <http://www.firstvoices.com/en/Tagish/words>
 - Phrases. <http://www.firstvoices.com/en/Tagish/phrase-books>
 - Audio files of First Words. <http://www.firstvoices.com/en/Tagish>
- Audio files, word lists, and other resources at Glottolog. <http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/tagi1240>
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